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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002942

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/I-PM, AND NEA/IR. NSC FOR PHEE
AND VROOMAN

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SUBJECT: MUTHANA PROVINCIAL COUNCIL REJECTS GOI PLAN TO
RELOCATE MEK TO SAMAWA

REF: BAGHDAD 2841 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The GOI's plan to relocate Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) residents from Ashraf to Muthana on December 15 appears to have fallen apart, as the Muthana Provincial Council (PC), with the backing of the governor and local Iraqi security forces (ISF) commanders, rejected the plan on grounds that the MEK's presence would destabilize security in the province. The decision, if it withstands political pressure from Baghdad, could force the GOI to postpone the December 15 relocation as it explores other (few) viable alternatives. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On October 29, a relatively unknown Arabic media outlet, "Al-Fateh", reported: "The Muthana Provincial Council rejected governmental request to transport Camp Ashraf to Muthana Province. The Muthana Provincial Council pointed out that the Khalq (MEK) 'Hypocrites' have committed many crimes against the Iraqi people and that they would destabilize security in the province." (NOTE: The Iranian government also uses "hypocrite" when describing the MEK. END NOTE). The Muthana Deputy PC Chairman subsequently confirmed to us the press report and noted that the governor and local ISF concurred with the PC's decision. GOI Ashraf Committee Chairman, Ali Yassery, also confirmed to post that Muthana is no longer a viable option. It remains unclear what other viable relocation sites, if any, are available to the GOI at this time.

13. (C) In a separate meeting on October 31, Iraq's Minister of Human Rights, Wijdan Salim, a member of the GOI's Ashraf Committee, informed poloffs that she will chair a legal committee tasked with compiling the legal facts against the MEK. The information will be distributed to the international community and Iraqi embassies abroad for circulation to host governments. Wijdan questioned the utility of relocating the MEK from Ashraf and considers the December 15 relocation deadline malleable--more of a negotiating tool intended to pressure the MEK than a hard deadline. (NOTE: Wijdan's views do not necessarily reflect those of Maliki's inner circle, most of whom are close to Iran and welcome decisive action against the MEK. END NOTE)

14. (C) Poloffs, including Post's spokesman and the Ambassador's senior media advisor, stressed to Wijdan the importance of developing a viable GOI media strategy to dispel misperceptions and ensure transparency going forward. Wijdan acknowledged the GOI's media shortcomings and asked for direct USG media guidance to facilitate the GOI's efforts. (NOTE: Post provided Wijdan a media strategy "non-paper" outlining the elements of an effective GOI media strategy, including relevant questions and themes. A copy of the non-paper has also been emailed to NEA/I-PM and NSC Iraq

staff. END NOTE).

COMMENT

15. (C) The Muthana PC decision was unexpected, but not altogether surprising given public dislike of the MEK. The decision has put a dent in the GOI's plan and was apparently prompted by a GOI assessment visit to the proposed relocation site. Security is a valid concern the GOI has not factored into their planning. Yassery recently turned down Post's request to visit the site, stating that the GOI had yet to finalize its decision on Camp Samawa in Muthana. With no readily identifiable alternatives, the GOI may renew its interest in FOB Echo in Diwaniyah. The GOI had settled on Qinterest in FOB Echo in Diwaniyah. The GOI had settled on Muthana after realizing that Echo would not be transferred to GOI control until after January 2010. Without other relocation options, GOI attention may shift back to FOB Echo, which would force it to delay relocation until after the election. However, the Diwaniyah provincial council may have similar reservations. Post will follow-up with Yassery and Wijdan to determine GOI next steps.

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